

★ news release

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INTERIOR SUBMITS DRAFT BILL ON SHARING WILDLIFE REFUGE REVENUES

The recommendation was made in a letter to Senator Warren G. Magnuson, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Commerce, concerning the Department's attitude regarding S. 2138, S. 2678, S. 2770, S. 2927, and S. 3201, all of which would amend the current law providing for sharing revenues from wildlife refuges with counties. The Department said it strongly recommends enactment of the legislation, but added that it prefers certain amendments which it offered in a substitute draft bill.

The present system of revenue-sharing was established by Congress in 1935 and provides that 25 percent of the net proceeds from the sale of surplus wildlife, timber, hay, grass, or other products of the soil, and from other privileges on wildlife refuges, are to be paid at the end of each fiscal year to the particular county or counties where refuges are located. The money is to be used solely for the benefit of public schools and roads in such counties. The remaining 75 percent of the net refuge receipts are used for management and improvement of the National Wildlife Refuge System and enforcement of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

The Department of the Interior's draft bill proposes continuing the current system regarding public lands reserved for National wildlife refuges. However, with respect to lands of the National Wildlife Refuge System that have been acquired in fee by the United States, the suggested bill provides for annual payments of three-fourths of 1 percent of the adjusted cost of such lands, exclusive of improvements since Federal acquisition, to all counties where such lands are located, regardless whether such lands were revenue-producing. All net revenues from the National Wildlife Refuge System would be placed in a separate fund from which payments would be made to counties. The adjusted cost of the lands,

representing current values as determined by the Secretary of the Interior, would be subject to review at 5-year intervals. No payments would be made in excess of the total annual revenues collected.

Such legislation would facilitate future land acquisitions for the National Wildlife Refuge System, the Department said. Congress recently authorized an advance of \$105 million for an accelerated "wetlands" acquisition program over a seven-year period to save essential waterfowl habitat for conservation purposes before it is devoted to other uses. Such acquisitions must be approved by Governors or appropriate State agencies in the respective States. Some opposition has been indicated unless suitable provision is made to compensate counties for revenues they would have received had the acquired lands been in private ownership.

According to the Department, the draft bill would permit a desirable readjustment and revision of existing shared revenue authorization.

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